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ABSTRACT

This survey examines the perceptions of students enrolled in one or more independent-study courses offered by the Division of Independent Study of the National University Continuing Education Association. The survey's purpose was to determine students' attitudes, opinions, and perceptions toward correspondence instruction and to determine the need for this educational alternative. A review of existing literature shows that negative attitudes toward correspondence instruction improved following the first half of the century and that they are more favorable today. Previous research has generally attempted to learn how well correspondence study served as a delivery system. This research indicates that correspondence achievement was equal to or exceeded that of classroom learning. In the current study, a random sample of 235 students were asked to compare experiences in the regular classroom with those of correspondence instruction. Mail responses were received from 142 correspondence students, ages 14 to 53, representing 13 states. Respondents indicated a general satisfaction with correspondence instruction as offered. Students favored the opportunity to take courses not offered in local schools and liked working at their own pace. A majority said grading was comparable to classroom courses and that correspondence courses were as difficult or more difficult from regularly offered courses. Lacking direct instructor contact was the disadvantage mentioned most often. Students also indicated the turn-around time for lessons was adequate to slow. The study recommends increased funding for correspondence programs, increased use of new technologies by correspondence educators, improved instructional development, and inservice training. The appendixes include the student questionnaire and a list of respondents' individual courses. (TES)

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STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

A Plan B Paper
Presented to
the Faculty of
Tri College University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Educational Administration

by

Neil D. Howe

May, 1990

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N.D.H.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements i

List of Tables and Scales iv

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION 1

Overview 1
Background History 3
Limitations of the Study 7
Purpose of the Study 7
Statement of the Problem 7
Definition of Terms 8
Significance of the Study 9

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 11

Introduction 11
Principles of Correspondence Instruction 12
Statement Supported Correspondence Instruction in North Dakota 20
Student Achievement through Correspondence Instruction 29
Future of Correspondence Instruction 50
Summary 53

III. METHODS 57

Introduction 57
Description of the Population 57
Method 57
Data Analysis 58

IV. RESULTS 61

Introduction 61
Ages of Students 61
Students' Schools 62

Students' Residence by State 63
Courses Currently Enrolled 63
Discussion of Results 99

V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..102

A. Student Questionnaire 122

B. Letter Accompanying Student Questionnaire.....127

C. Follow-Up Letter 129

D. List of Students' Schools 131

E. List of Individual Courses of Student Respondents 134

LIST OF TABLES AND SCALES

Table
Page

1 Number and Percentage of Students' Ages 62

2 Number and Percentage of Students' Residence by State 64

3 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 1: Reasons for Enrolling in Correspondence Study 66

4 Number of Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 2: The Difficulty of Correspondence Courses Compared to Regular Classroom Courses 68

5 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 3: The Quality of Supervision at the Local Level 69

6 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 4: Comparison of Grades Earned by Correspondence and Those in the Traditional Classroom 70

7 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 5: The Clarity of Lesson Assignments in the Student Written Work 71

8 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 6: The Clarity of Lesson Instructions in the Student Written Work 73

9 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 7: The clarity of Lesson Objectives in the Student Written Work 74

10 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 8: The Appropriateness of Questions Asked in the Student Written Work 75

11 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 9: The Amount of Written Work Submitted to the Division 76

12 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 10: The Quality of Instruction Given by Division Instructors 77

13 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 11: The Turn-Around Time of Lessons 78

14 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 12: The Most Difficult Aspects of Correspondence Study 80

15 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 13: Advantages of Correspondence Instruction 85

16 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 14: Disadvantages of Correspondence Instruction 88

17 Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 15: Comments and Recommendations Concerning Correspondence Instruction 91

Scale

1 Means of Students' Responses to Items 2-7, 10, and 11: Likert Scale on Students' Perceptions of Correspondence Study 98

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In recent years it has been suggested that at least some high school students have the potential ability to take an active part in the self-direction of their own educations. William Alexander and Vynce Hines (1967) conclude that the focus of education should be "to develop self-directing learners able to achieve their potential in an ever-changing society" (p. 1).

One way students can take an active part in their education is through correspondence instruction. Traditionally and historically, however, educators have held a less than positive attitude toward this form of educational experience. McAfee (1973) states that the immediate objections to using correspondence courses in the secondary school probably center on one or more of the following:

1. a belief that students taking correspondence courses will not learn as much as pupils in the regular classroom

2. the fear that correspondence courses cannot be used to meet the entrance requirements of institutions of higher learning

3. the belief that the use of correspondence courses in the secondary school will adversely affect the accreditation of the secondary school by state or regional accreditating agency

4. the belief that correspondence courses are poorly prepared by unqualified persons

5. the related belief that correspondence courses come only from "diploma mills" (p. 34).

That attitude may be slowly changing. McAfee goes on to say, "... with the high cost of adding programs and personnel, maybe it is time to take another look at correspondence study" (p. 34). Although he made this statement nearly 17 years ago, McAfee makes a good point. The problems of budget cuts, lack of qualified personnel, and declining enrollments continue to plague many school systems in the nation.

McAfee further magnifies the need for correspondence instruction.

> There are throughout the nation many school districts which because of low population density, location or intense localism

> contain small secondary schools with inadequate staffs, inadequate facilities, student populations too small to justify program expansion, and inadequate tax bases upon which to finance comprehensive secondary programs (p. 34).

Background History

Searching for the origins of twentieth century correspondence teaching leads to various individuals and institutions throughout the United States. As compulsory school attendance laws became common in the later part of the nineteenth century, teachers and administrators began focusing on high school education. In particular, school officials were concerned with dropouts. Those involved with early attempts to provide high school correspondence instruction believed it was their duty to give those dropouts a second chance at an education. At that point, according to Ossian MacKenzie (1968), "... the concept of a 'high school equivalency' education began to grow in stature" (p. 31).

One of the earliest high school correspondence programs in the United States was developed in 1923 by Sidney B. Mitchell, superintendent of schools in Benton Harbor, Michigan. Mitchell sought to enrich the local school curriculum by offering vocational courses.

Mitchell (MacKenzie, 1968) called this Benton Harbor plan "supervised correspondence instruction" (p. 23).

The University of Nebraska became the first state university system to experiment with correspondence instruction in 1929. The University of Nebraska promoted a program in which high schools provided supervision for courses taken by correspondence, usually during the regular school day (MacKenzie, 1968).

Following the University of Nebraska's efforts at providing high school correspondence instruction, university interest for this alternative education intensified. Of the 71 members and affiliates of the Division of Independent Study within the National University Continuing Education Association (NUCEA) in 1989, 36 offered courses by correspondence at the high school level (The Independent Study Catalog, 1989).

T.W. Thordarson, pioneer educator and founder of the Division of Independent Study (the Division), sought to make correspondence courses available to rural students in North Dakota. His commitment to educating by correspondence is expressed in a published pamphlet (1940). He states:

> The philosophy permeating this program is utilitarian in nature. It emphasizes the

> importance of providing a very broad curriculum which will satisfy the cultural and vocational needs for the people. It emphasizes individualized instruction on a functional basis. It recognizes a need for an enrichment program on a low-cost basis usable in any school in the country, for the simple reason that all curriculum-enrichment endeavors have been inadequate for the smaller schools because of insufficient finances, personnel, and equipment (Thordarson, 1940, p. 3).

Thordarson envisioned a correspondence high school in which students and adults unable to attend an organized high school would have the opportunity to receive an education and regular high school students would be given a chance to study courses not offered locally.

Origination and implementation of correspondence education in North Dakota had begun. In 1934

> at the state convention of the Farmers Educational and Co-operative Union a woman member presented a resolution calling upon the officers of the organization to endeavor to make correspondence study available to all North Dakota children who could not avail

themselves of the regular school system (Thordarson, 1938, p. 9).

The resolution was adopted, and in 1935 North Dakota became the first state to provide a special appropriation for a high school correspondence program when the North Dakota Legislative Assembly established the Division of Indpendent Study (Stone, 1985).

The high school correspondence program was established for the purposes of:

1. assuring a high school education for those who, although unable to attend a high school, could do this work by correspondence while attending rural elementary schools
2. providing an enlarged curriculum for organized high schools and eliminating small and expensive classes
3. permitting those who are physically unable to attend school to enroll in high school correspondence courses
4. providing high school courses for adults (Legislative Research Committee, 1965, p. 70).

The correspondence school opened in 1935 with a staff consisting of the director, eight part-time teachers and three office workers. The school was located in Old Main Building and later Minard Hall at the North Dakota Agricultural College (NDAC). NDAC

later became North Dakota State University (The Correspondence Experience, 1985, p. 3)

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the perceptions of students currently enrolled in one or more courses at the Division of Independent Study. A listing of students enrolled between July 1, 1989 and September 30, 1989 was used to determine the population for this survey study. The computer list of students was made available by Bernice Watkins, Division Registrar.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this survey was to determine the attitudes, opinions, and perceptions students have toward correspondence study.

Statement of the Problem

Students were asked to relate and compare experiences in the regular classroom with those of correspondence instruction. Further, the study sought to ascertain the need for this alternative form of education. Information obtained from this study will be used by the staff, faculty, and administration to better meet the needs of independent study students.

Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study were defined as follows:

Correspondence Instructor: "The individual at the Correspondence center, responsible for making corrections, suggestions and criticism on the required responses" (Lytle, 1937, p. 6).

Correspondence Study Center: "The source of instructional materials and instructional services used in supervised correspondence program" (Lytle, 1937, p. 6).

Local Supervisor: "The individual who carries out the functions of supervision for correspondence study in the local school" (Lytle, 1937, p. 6).

Supervised Correspondence Study: "Supervised correspondence study designates that procedure in which the local school secures the instructional materials, provides regular periods in the school day for study, supervises the work of the student, and returns the required written responses to the correspondence center for suggestions, corrections and criticism" (Lytle, 1937, p. 6).

Significance of the Study

Childs (1990) states that "if correspondence study did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it" (p. 1). Childs made the statement in regard to the contribution correspondence study has made to the total scheme of education. Since its inception, correspondence study has appeared in a wide variety of places, and the world has been witness to the rarest of rarities, a genuinely new development in the field of education. "It was the first time that societies began, in an organized way, to provide instruction to persons who were not physically in the presence of a teacher" (p. 1).

According to Renee F. Erdos (1967), "... increasing use of correspondence teaching and increasing recognition of qualifications gained by correspondence students is coming about as a result of the success with which correspondence students meet" p. 7). This conclusion is especially important to educators and researchers interested in further study of student perception of correspondence instruction. To understand how individual students meet success--or fail to do so--is worthy of further research.

A brief search of most libraries will result in

the realization that research in the area of correspondence education is minimal at best. It is imperative that those actively involved in correspondence education conduct research on this alternative educational approach. Although several studies have been conducted on student perception of correspondence study, no recent research has been completed on the Division of Independent Study. It is important for the Division to systematically gather data regarding student perception of the program.

In describing the challenge of a learning society, Edgar Dale (1963) notes

> the test of a modern society capable of meeting change with accelerated evolution instead of revolution does not lie in asking,"Is Everybody Happy?" but rather, "Is Everybody Learning?" To be learning is not only a condition for survival; it is also the basis for being richly alive (p. 2).

This study seeks to answer the question "Is Everybody Learning?" and if so, is correspondence instruction assisting the student in accomplishing this goal?

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The lack of literature related to this particular topic of study becomes clear as research is pursued. Much of the material that is available is quite old. For the purposes of this paper, however, the older research appears to be worthy of review and necessary for the significance of the study. A number of studies concerning student perceptions of correspondence instruction were conducted prior to 1960. Contrary to that, individuals such as Dr. Bruce O. Barker of Texas Tech University have shown a renewed interest to investigate student perceptions of correspondence instruction during the 1980's.

Perhaps the lack of research that exists prior to 1960 stems in part from a degree of limited funding, lack of acceptance of correspondence instruction, or a combination of these two factors. In 1966 Charles A. Wedemeyer (Stone, 1985) notes, "... the negative image of correspondence held by educators was changing, possibly because of the new emphasis on independent

learning in the traditional classroom" (p. 12). This lack of current research, along with a renewed interest in correspondence as an alternative form of education, intensifies the need for this study.

This literature review has four parts: Principles of Correspondence Instruction; State Supported Correspondence Instruction in North Dakota; Student Achievement Through Correspondence Instruction; and Future of Correspondence Instruction. Within each of these four areas, pertinent research relative to the principles of correspondence instruction and student achievement through correspondence will be reported.

Principles of Correspondence Instruction

According to Erdos (1967), the principles of correspondence teaching, like the principles of teaching by any other medium, are rooted in the general laws of human learning. Erdos states:

1. Learning is more effective when students want to learn.
2. Learning is more efficient when it is made meaningful by the recall of relevant past experience.
3. Purposeful practice and repetition are necessary.
4. Learning is quicker and more lasting when the learning activity is appropriate to the learner's level of development.

5. Learning is an activity which must be carried out by the learner.

6. Immediate reinforcement helps learning.

7. Transfer of learning makes possible the application of behavior or responses learned in one situation to other situations (p. 10).

These generally accepted principles place on those who teach by correspondence, no less than on teachers using any other method, the clearly defined responsibilities of all teaching. Correspondence teachers must motivate their students. "They must design exercises adapted to the level of the student which will stimulate him, give purposeful practice, repetition and reinforcement, and provide an opportunity to apply the principles he has learned in previous situations" (Erdos, p. 10).

Erdos also emphasizes that corespondence instruction is "effective in all subjects which can be taught by the lecture method alone, that is in all subjects in which the basis of teaching is words which may be as easily written and read as spoken" (p. 6). He suggests, however, that subjects involving practical demonstration and supervision in a laboratory would have limitations. Even so, the teaching of theory for those courses involving laboratory work has great

potential as well.

Ralph Tyler (Unruh, 1970) reviewed the succession of twentieth-century efforts to individualize instruction, and he lists the concepts he found characteristic of current efforts:

1. The individual should be able to work at his own rate.
2. He should be able to work at times convenient to him.
3. The slow learner should not be embarassed by feeling that he is much slower than others.
4. Individuals are at different points in their progress along a single continuum (the assumption that learning progress is linear, which Tyler notes as applying to "only some aspects of learning").
5. A few factors, easily indentifiable, interfere with progress; these must be diagnosed, and the student must be helped to overcome them.
6. The student should be able to select from the wealth of available media those that he finds most effective in his own learning (pp. 26-27).

Unruh (1970) concludes that the self-direction and self-responsibility applied to learning is well illustrated in the effective practices of independent study. Recognition of individual differences as

opposed to mass instruction is one of the most important concepts behind several of the innovations in secondary education. "One of the significant contributions of research and development in education has been the assistance offered in diagnosis of individual differences in learners" (p. 12). Certainly correspondence instruction has contributed to this concept.

Broady (1952) makes a strong argument in favor of correspondence education claiming, "... that we endeavor, through correspondence instruction, not only to extend the scope of our educational program by providing wider selection of subjects, but also to lay down a pattern which will inform the student regarding the qualifications necessary for his success" (p. 142).

Broady promotes the principles of correspondence instruction as a means of providing:

1. curricular enrichment,
2. pupil acceleration,
3. help to students who have failed or fallen behind in some subject,
4. a solution to schedule difficulties, and
5. an introduction for pupils still in school to a method of education available throughout adult life (p. 47).

Alexander (1967) finds that characteristically, "... the individual's learning in school has been largely other-directed, without a natural progression from teacher direction to self direction as the learner becomes more mature and presumably more capable to self-direction" (p. 2). Indeed, the tendency has been to increase the amount of direction in the form of assignments of homework, typically uniform for all students, as the learner progresses in school. Alexander also finds:

> ... even as the individual is seeking to become more independent of parental and other external authority, the teacher typically imposes increasing requirements of learning tasks too often to be accomplished regardless of their relation to the learner's own goals and aspirations (p. 3).

It is no wonder that many adolescents tolerate schools only until they can drop out, and that even larger numbers flounder if and when they have opportunity to create their own learning goals and activities in high school.

Thus, according to Alexander, "... education aiming to develop the self-directing learner is education of the highest order involving both the

affective and cognitive areas" (p. 3). It is education which seeks a type of personal development that enables the student to behave ultimately as an independent learner. Alexander believes that correspondence instruction aims to develop the following specific behaviors required for a successful education:

1. The independent learner undertakes on his own initiative learning tasks that are important to him.
2. He uses sources of information efficiently.
3. He tests out reflectively possible answers, solutions, and ideas to see whether they are adequate.
4. He seeks to apply generalizations from former to new situations.
5. He is not easily discouraged by the difficulty of the learning task nor by forces which would have him accept inadequate answers, solutions, and ideas.
6. He enjoys learning and seeks opportunities to learn (p. 4).

Edgar Dale (Alexander, 1967) notes that today's student must be flexible:

> The person educated for flexibility will see the world in a fresh inventive way. He will not be chained to the immediate, the customary, the habitual. He will not be dependent on someone else to plan his route

> and show him how to get there. He will chart his own course (p. 2).

Although spoken more than 20 years ago, Dale's comments have current relevance, and correspondence is a viable means for the "flexible" student to chart a course of study.

Alexander concludes that schooling should be viewed as the process whereby the learner is helped to become sufficiently independent of school and teacher so that he can and will carry on his own learning enterprises successfully after schooling has ended. The central aim of education should be "the development of self-directing learners" (p. 1). As a result, correspondence instruction as a form of independent study is both an end and a means of education.

At this point it is worth noting one of the most respected individuals in the field of correspondence instruction, Gayle Childs, past director of the University of Nebraska Extension Division. Childs (1973) points out that correspondence study in its more traditional form or in its various independent study aspects is at least as effective in terms of measurable learning outcomes as any other method. Childs makes a strong case in favor of correspondence instruction by stating:

1. It has the inestimable value of being as flexible, or more so than any other method.
2. It is almost universally accessible.
3. It has no time and space limitations.
4. Study can take place at any place and at any time.
5. It can be used by persons alone or in a group.
6. It can be used with a teacher present or absent.
7. It can be used in conjunction with other methods or by itself.
8. It has no predetermined starting time and ending time but permits each student to set his own pace.
9. It adjusts automatically to interruptions in the learning schedule because of sickness or for other reasons by just sitting there and waiting for the student instead of marching on with the class while the student sits there.
10. Its costs are relatively low because one teacher can work with many students and outlays for building costs are at a minimum (pp. 25-26).

Childs spent many years exploring at some length the relationship between general methods of teaching and student achievement. A firm believer in the correspondence method, Childs attempted to lay to rest, once and for all, the myth of methodological superiority of traditional methods of instruction.

"There is no general method, such as classroom instruction, to which all other methods are inferior. There is no established hierarchy in which methods stand in an orderly continuum from most effective to least effective" (p. 25).

Childs believes that some day someone or some group will devise a method of instruction so logical, so well integrated, so efficient in its operation, and so attuned to the human nervous system that it will produce better results than any other method. "But the time is not yet and that method is not here. Until it does arrive correspondence instruction need bow to no one" (p. 26).

State Supported Correspondence Instruction in North Dakota

The Division of Independent Study was inaugurated as a result of a law passed by the North Dakota Legislative Assembly in 1935. According to Amundson (1956) the purpose of the law was to attempt to equalize school opportunities throughout the state. "The need for such a law became apparent when it was discovered that only about one-half of the rural youth were receiving a high school education" (p. 3). At the same time, it was noted that the curriculum of most small high schools was narrow and inflexible. Because

of this narrow and inflexible curriculum, the needs of many students in the state were not being met.

With the passage of the law in 1935, the correspondence school was established in Fargo on the campus of the North Dakota State Agricultural College. T.W. Thordarson was appointed the first director of the school. In the first years, the school was called the Department of Correspondence Study and was later renamed the Division of Independent Study. The North Dakota State Agricultural College became North Dakota State University in 1960.

Thordarson (1939) was an enthusiastic advocate of this new program and emphasized that the correspondence school meet the needs of the biggest schools in the state as well as the smallest. "It provides a great progressive step in education in North Dakota and this service is a challenge to the high schools" (p. 12). In the earliest years of the correspondence school, Thordarson presented the method as a simple and practical solution to the following school problems:

1. to make high school available to all farm boys and girls
2. to provide high school training for disabled youngsters

3. to increase the number of subjects available in high school
4. to meet individual needs of students
5. to care for irregular pupils
6. to care for pupils who fail
7. to provide vocational subjects
9. to provide specialied subjects
10. to provide worthwhile courses for postgraduates and adults
11. to reduce teaching loads of overloaded teachers
12. to equalize educational opportunities for all the people of the state.

Although much of the terminology used by Thordarson has been modified and modernized over the years, the intention and purpose of the program are clear. In later years, the types of students served by the Division were summarized in fewer categories. Amundson (1956) indicates that the correspondence school served four major types of students:

1. rural youth who live a long distance from a regular high school and are unable to stay in town to go to school
2. students who attend a regular high school, but find the local school curricula too narrow to satisfy their needs

3. adult students who want to complete or broaden their education

4. people who are handicapped in some manner and are unable to attend school or receive training because of their disability (p. 5).

Thordarson's (1939) commitment and enthusiasm for correspondence study provided a hallmark for the years he served as director. Beginning in 1935 until his retirement in 1968, Thordarson believed that correspondence study, as an alternative form of education, served the people well. Later he writes:

> ... a supervised correspondence study program could be likened to an equilateral triangle; one side represents the pupil who selects a subject he likes but cannot get in his school; the second side is the local supervisor who needs to be sympathetic with his pupils and a good manager of others; the third side is the Center specialist (teacher)who needs to have an understanding heart, a broad understanding of a community, appreciation of human abilities, and a meaningful philosophy of educational purposes for a useful life (Thordarson, 1952, p. 37).

Although the concept of correspondence study is

not new to North Dakota, the program has not always enjoyed favorable reception. The North Dakota Legislative Research Subcommittee (1963) mailed a questionnaire concerning the high school correspondence program to 304 high school superintendents and county superintendents in the state. The findings of this research were less than positive. Results from 235 (77%) indicated that a majority (65.5%) felt the need for the program had decreased since its inception in 1935. Results of the survey also indicated that 60% did not believe it was essential to maintain the program (Legislative Research Committee, 1965).

As a result of the research conducted by the subcommittee in 1963, the Thirty-ninth Legislative Assembly placed several requirements on the Division's operation. According to the 1981 North Dakota Century Code (Meester, 1986), the Division would come under the direct control of the Board of Public School Education. This resulted in the stipulation that the Board approve all curriculum, certify qualifications of all instructors, and appoint the director. In addition, it was also mandated that students under the age of 16 would need the approval of the local school administrator to enroll in a Division course.

A year following the research conducted by the Legislative Subcommittee, Ben Gustafson (1964) wrote a letter to C. Emerson Murray, a member of the Legislative Research Committee. Regarding correspondence instruction, Gustafson stated, "... the need for 'High School Supervised Study' type of class for current high school enrollees is decreasing with the increase in the number of large, well-organized consolidated schools that have a broad program of offerings" (p. 1).

Perhaps, in many ways, the research conducted in 1963 benefited the operation of the Division. Since that time, the school has operated according to the requirements mandated by the Legislature. In addition, the school has maintained an enrollment consistent with figures prior to and since 1963 (Annual Reports, 1935-1989).

Stone (1985) summarizes the findings of the Legislative Research Subcommittee by stating:

> Supervised correspondence study provided schools with courses for enrichment, for scheduling conflicts and other school needs, but the literature indicated that by the 1960's a majority of the North Dakota school superintendents and county superintendents

felt there was a diminished need for the North Dakota Division of Independent Study (p. 30).

In regard to Ben Gustafson's letter to C. Emerson Murray, which was mentioned earlier, it is worth noting that the 1988-89 Annual Report of the Division of Independent Study directly contradicts his contention. The Annual Report indicates that students from 206 of the 236 North Dakota high schools were enrolled during the 1988-89 school year. "The larger the high school, the greater was the usage of the Division's courses" (Annual Report, 1988-89, p. 2). The report goes on to indicate that one hundred percent of the schools with an enrollment over 500 students used the Division's correspondence courses.

In a discussion of history of the state operation of the Division of Independent Study and the requirements mandated by the Thirty-ninth Legislative Assembly, one last alteration in the supervision of the Division needs to be mentioned. Independent Learning (1990) states that the North Dakota Division of Independent Study officially became part of the Department of Public Instruction effective July 1, 1989. "The Division's Director now reports to the Superintendent of Public Instruction" (p. 1), however, the State Board of Public School Education continues to

approve curriculum policy for the Division.

The plan to merge the Division of Independent Study with the Department of Public Instruction was proposed by Governor George Sinner. House Bill 1559 of the Fifty-first Legislative session was drawn, introduced and passed by both houses without opposition (Independent Learning, 1990).

Since 1935, the Division has experienced name changes, continual growth, and many technological advances in the delivery of educational materials. "By becoming part of the Department of Public Instruction, the Division is confident that its strong tradition of excellence will continue" (Independent Learning, 1990, p. 1).

In order to modernize and foster the educational values and attitudes common to the statutory duties and responsibilities of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Division of Independent Study currently exists to:

1. provide a complete high school supervised correspondence curriculum free of time and place constraints
2. provide an alternative educational program of instruction for learners through comprehensive course materials, videotape supplements, individualized

teacher comments, and computer-assisted instruction

3. provide certified teachers who are professional, ethical, cooperative, and who possess a sense of empathy for students in the correspondence course

4. provide equitable educational opportunities for all registered students, including the opportunity to earn a high school diploma

5. provide teaching for learning with timely, motivational, and sensitive evaluations

6. provide new instructional technologies compatible with the correspondence course (Division of Independent Study Philosophy and Mission Statement, 1990).

Thordarson (1938) summarizes the need for a state-supported correspondence school by stating that this form of study by high school students is a part of progressive education. It encourages each student enrolled to achieve at his or her own rate of ability. Correspondence instruction serves as a democratic educational program for supplementing the general school system. Thordarson is careful to point out, however, that any program of this nature "... is not intended to displace any work that the regular school system can do" (p. 38). In North Dakota, then, correspondence instruction exists to remove some of the disadvantages that stand in the way of many people who

aspire for a better education.

Student Achievement through Correspondence Instruction

McAfee (1973) advocates that the use of correspondence study in the high school is an academically sound practice and each school administrator should explore the possibility of the program as a resource. McAfee believes that correspondence courses can offer advantages to a number of students for:

1. the better student who is bored with the regular pace of the classroom
2. the student who wants to advance more rapidly than his or her classmates
3. the student who wants to investigate new horizons
4. the slow student to proceed at his or her own pace
5. students seeking to study subjects not available under ordinary circumstances because of the limited facilities of the local school (p. 44).

Lytle (1937) conducted research in regard to the values of supervised correspondence study used in Nebraska and Kansas schools. A questionnaire was prepared and submitted to 50 school superintendents in Nebraska who had experience with supervised correspondence instruction. The questionnaire was also submitted to 50 Kansas superintendents to ascertain

specific information as to the need for supervised correspondence study in that state.

According to Lytle, superintendents in the two states listed a number of reasons for the existence of correspondence study. Among the reasons the superintendents agreed, correspondence instruction existed to:

1. increase the number of subjects available to students
2. provide courses for the irregular student
3. provide courses for students who have failed a subject in the local school
4. provide courses for the gifted student
5. provide vocational courses
6. offer courses to adults seeking a diploma
7. decrease costs of the local school
8. offer students the opportunity to study during the summer months
9. offer courses in subjects for which local teachers are not trained
10. provide vocational courses such as art and music
11. allow students to take courses for which they have an aptitude or interest
12. provide students with additional credits for graduation requirements

13. provide courses for rural students unable to attend a local high school
14. permit teachers in the classroom to teach more than one subject at a time
15. assist a local community to provide the full four years of high school (pp. 89-90).

Lytle concludes that since the problem has been concerned with both "... the values of supervised correspondence study and the needs of Kansas schools, the final analysis shows the relationship which seems to exist between them" (p. 79).

Hanna (1940) investigated the relationship between the grades and achievement earned by students enrolled in supervised correspondence study and those students enrolled in the regular classroom. In this study, Hanna selected students enrolled through the University of Nebraska Correspondence Center and the center in Missoula, Montana. Hanna sought answers to whether:

1. There was a relationship between grades earned by the two groups of students.
2. Grades earned through correspondence study were too high compared to achievement.
3. Grades earned through correspondence study

indicated high achievement in the subject (p. 68).

For the purpose of the study, Hanna used achievement tests from the following subjects: bookkeeping, chemistry, elementary algebra, Latin, and typewriting. Based on the study findings, Hanna made the following conclusions:

1. Achievement of students enrolled in correspondence courses in bookkeeping, Latin, and typewriting was as satisfactory as or more satisfactory than those students enrolled in the classroom.
2. There was no definite conclusion concerning the achievement of the two groups in elementary algebra and chemistry.
3. Students enrolled in correspondence courses who showed high achievement in elementary algebra, bookkeeping, and Latin also received high grades through correspondence courses.
4. Grades given by the correspondence school indicated high achievement as shown by opinions of local supervisors, instructors, and superintendents.
5. Ability levels of correspondence study students were higher than the typical student enrolled in the classroom as shown by the opinions of local supervisors, instructors, and superintendents (pp. 68-69).

Hellfritzsch (1941) conducted a comparative study of North Dakota high school freshmen students enrolled through the Department of Supervised Study and students enrolled in the regular classroom. For the purpose of this study, Hellfritzsch selected 202 students pursuing their work through correspondence in one-room rural school settings and 635 students enrolled in 26 regular high schools in the state. Both groups were given a battery of tests at the beginning of the study and again after five and one-half months of the study. During the survey, correspondence students studied six semester subjects (three credits) and the classroom freshmen studied eight semester subjects (four credits). The study sought to compare abilities based on the battery tests in the following subject areas: mathematical fundamentals, mathematical reasoning, natural sciences, reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, self-adjustment, social adjustment, and social studies.

Hellfritzsch comes to a number of conclusions regarding the comparisons of these two groups of freshmen students.

1. The status of both the correspondence and regular high school freshmen at the end of the five and one-half month experimental period compares favorably with

the status of freshmen throughout the nation in all of the areas measured.

2. The progress of correspondence freshmen in social studies and social adjustment during the experimental period surpasses that of regular high school freshmen in North Dakota during the same period, both differences being significant at the one percent level of confidence.

3. The regular high school freshmen gained significantly more than the correspondence freshmen in the fields of natural sciences and mathematical fundamentals.

4. In the fields of reading vocabulary, reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning, and self-adjustment no clear cut statement regarding the superiority of either group over the other can be made.

5. The foregoing findings concerning the merits of correspondence study are especially significant if one considers that the correspondence pupils took on the average only three-fourths of a normal load of courses.

6. In all fields except the natural sciences and mathematical fundamentals correspondence study produced gains equal to or greater than those observed in the regular high schools of North Dakota.

7. If one were to select the chief weak spot in each type of study to determine what might be done to improve the situation, the problem area in the regular high schools would lie in the field of self and social adjustment, and in correspondence study in the field of mathematical reasoning and fundamentals.

8. The greatest progress during the freshman year takes place in the natural sciences in the regular high schools of the state and in the field of social studies under supervised correspondence study (pp. 18-19).

What has been considered the classic study comparing achievement of supervised correspondence students and regular classroom students was conducted by G.B. Childs (Mathieson, 1971). In 1949, Childs selected students from five Nebraska high schools where University of Nebraska-Lincoln supervised correspondence courses were offered. Standardized achievement tests were used to measure achievement, and the tests were administered to both the students in correspondence as well as those in the regular classroom. The achievement tests were given in each of 14 selected subjects at the completion of the course work. Childs (1973) sums up his 1949 research by stating, "... in all but two comparisons, correspondence study students performed as well as or

better than their classroom counterparts and in the two cases which were the exception the differences were not significant" (p. 12).

Leo J. Amundson (1956), a former instructor at the Division of Independent Study, did a follow-up study of 157 students who had graduated from the Department of Supervised Study between 1949 and 1954. The study conducted by Amundson lends support as a basis for this paper. Several of the questions used in Amundson's survey provided a basis for the questionnaire used for the purposes of this study.

Amundson's research sought to answer several questions including:

1. Do Supervised Study graduates stay in their own communities after they graduate or do they move to other areas?
2. What occupations do the students enter after graduation?
3. Are they satisfied with their choice of occupation?
4. What are their plans for the future?
5. In what way did Supervised Study aid or hinder them?
6. Do they feel that they would be better prepared for life if they had graduated from a regular high school?

7. What opinions do they have as to the value of studying by Supervised Study?

8. What suggestions can they make for improving the work done by Supervised Study (p. 2)?

One hundred fifty-six (99%) graduates responded to Amundson's survey. Although a number of the purposes of his research do not pertain to this work, several do have importance. The respondents were asked to check the statement or statements from a checklist that most closely reflected their feeling toward correspondence instruction. The results indicated that:

1. Supervised Study was a wonderful help - 75%
2. I believe it helped me as much (or more) as if I had gone to a regular high school - 68%
3. It helped me to train for a job, but it did not help in learning to get along with people - 12%
4. I attended a regular high school in addition to studying by Supervised Study and I think that Supervised Study is a good method of studying, but it is better to go to a regular high school if possible - 31%
5. I believe every student should take at least one course by Supervised Study - 65%
6. Supervised Study was helpful in learning to get along with people, but it was of no help in training

for my job - 1%

7. I believe Supervised Study is all right if it is the only way you can receive an education - 18%

8. I don't believe any student should study by Supervised Study - 0% (pp. 37-38).

To the question of what suggestions could be made for improving correspondence study for future students, the 156 (99%) respondents cited that:

1. More advertising and publicity should be given to supervised study programs.

2. Students should be required to take vocational guidance tests.

3. More agriculture courses should be offered.

4. The state should appropriate more money for the operation of Supervised Study.

5. Each student should be introduced to the Supervised Study instructor with the first lesson.

6. More strict guidelines for completion should be maintained.

7. There should be a closer personal contact between instructor and student.

8. More summer school courses should be offered.

9. More reference books should be available.

10. Longer assignments and more outside reading should be required (pp.38-39).

Amundson's survey emphasizes that correspondence instruction meets favorably with a majority of students who have enrolled and graduated through the program. According to the opinions of the graduates in the survey,

> ... the strongest argument for Supervised Study in terms of educational values, appears to be the training of initiative and self-reliance that it gives to them. The greatest weakness of the school according to the graduates appears to be the lack of social activities and the failure to provide for social contacts (p. 45).

Amundson recommends a number of options that should be considered for further study concerning student perception of correspondence study. Besides graduates, seeking the opinions of all students enrolled would be an excellent method of discovering why courses are taken and with what success. In addition, Amundson believes a more detailed study of each student as to the development of personality, character, attitudes or scholastic attainment would reveal further information as to the value of the courses and the type of students who enroll in them. Amundson concludes by stating his belief in follow-up

studies for all schools. The educational values of any school may certainly be determined by these studies.

This writer notes the conspicuous lack of research on achievement by correspondence students during the 1970's. During the 1980's, however, Bruce Barker, Assistant Professor of Education at Texas Tech University, and others have made important contributions to this area of research. Barker and Muse (1984) believe that the problems of many small, rural schools in America are the same problems that face education in general: inadequate finances, shortage of teachers, changing social values, pressures from special interest groups, and other similar problems. Barker and Muse feel that the unfortunate aspect of this matter is that these problems seem greater to the small schools. The problem is further intensified when these small schools attempt to face the challenge of providing the many and varied educational opportunities the local community demands. To believe that these small schools cannot meet this challenge is a fallacy, according to Barker and Muse. "The challenge facing administrators, teachers, parents, students, and community members in rural areas is to optimize available resources in order to provide

the most meaningful education possible for students" (p. 7).

Barker and Muse report that one of the most common criticisms directed toward small, rural schools is that these schools are unable to provide educational opportunities equal to those offered in larger schools. This inability should not be the case, according to their research. The idea "... is not to 'carbon' copy programs and policies of larger schools, rather to optimize those characteristics and strengths which are inherent in small schools" (p. 1). Many outstanding and innovative practices such as correspondence study do exist among small and rural schools in this country. Many more could be implemented.

One small school, Liberty School District in Spangle, Washington (Barker, 1985) reported that curricular offerings for their 180 secondary students had expanded from less than 15 elective courses to over 100 through the use of supervised correspondence study courses. The school district allowed high school students to enroll in one or two correspondence courses each semester and financed the tuition costs for them.

> Students participating in correspondence study attended a "correspondence class" supervised by a member of the high school

> faculty who monitored students' work, maintained records of students' progress, provided assistance or tutoring when able, and proctored exams sent from bonafide correspondence schools. It was reported that many students developed interests in careers they would not otherwise have studied (p. 4).

The program developed at Liberty High School in December of 1976 when a Native American student, a senior in school, expressed an interest in taking a correspondence course for credit. The student had sent for information from a magazine ad offering training for a person interested in Fish and Game Management (Liberty School District, 1981).

To implement the correspondence program at Liberty High School, the administration proposed four objectives to initiate the plan:

1. to expose 37 seniors and 47 juniors to many new job possibilities via correspondence courses
2. to increase the total vocational subject offerings from 15 to at least several hundred
3. to have at least 20 students actually select courses from the total new listings by the end of the 1977-78 school year.

4. to maintain the current teaching staff with the exception of hiring a secretary/aide to order courses and set up materials in the correspondence study room (Liberty School District, 1981).

In part, Liberty School District initiated the program because it believed that it was an unhealthy practice of holding students in courses they despised or otherwise did not want. As an alternative, the correspondence program provided an easy and simple means to alleviate scheduling problems and developed into one of the better things that can happen in the elective part of secondary education. The local school administrator states:

> Our correspondence research and experimental project strongly supports the theory that correspondence and similar teaching-learning methods incorporated with regular high school efforts, can greatly improve the potential of small high schools. We are convinced after testing it with the 187 student population at Liberty High School that it is a viable system which can work in other small schools (p. 8).

As things now exist, students in small conventional high schools often must be satisfied with

the very limited offerings which these schools can muster, often ignoring student interests, aptitudes, abilities or the requirements of the job market. The example set by Liberty High School in Spangle, Washington is a model worth nothing.

In another similar study, Barker and Petersen (1984) assessed the use of correspondence courses in small schools, including reasons students enroll in the courses and the type(s) who choose to do so. In November of 1983, Barker and Peterson mailed a questionnaire to 475 operating public high schools in the United States that had enrollments of less than 500.

Question eight of the survey asked school principals to rate the extent to which correspondence courses were recommended to students in their schools. A Likert-type scale was used to rank the responses:

1 (not recommended) - 18.7%
2 - 31.1%
3 - 24.6%
4 - 17.0%
5 (frequently recommended) - 8.6%

Question nine of the survey asked principals to list the three major reasons for students enrolling in correspondence courses:

1. to earn make-up credit - 86.6%
2. to resolve scheduling conflicts - 61.8%
3. to supplement the local curriculum - 41.8%

Question ten asked the principals to identify the characteristics of the typical student who enrolls in correspondence study in their school. The total student enrollment in this study population was 93,188 students. Of these students, principals indicated that:

1. "A" students accounted for 13.4%
2. "B" students accounted for 11.6%.
3. "C" students accounted for 13.4%
4. "D" and "F" students accounted for 61.7%.

In this study, Barker and Peterson conclude that correspondence courses are accepted by most high school administrators as a bonafide means by which students can earn credit to apply toward graduation. Nevertheless, only a very small percentage of students actually enroll for such courses and the majority of these are "D" and "F" students who need to earn make-up credit in order to graduate (p. 19).

DiSilvestro (1982) conducted an informal study of 223 high school students enrolled at the Indiana University Independent Study Division. In the study, DiSilvestro investigated the use of learning contracts

and the effect they had on lesson submission and completion rates. The idea of using the behavioral contracts to motivate students dates back to the 1930's. The theory behind behavioral contracts states that if a student has been given a desired goal, and a path is given to reach the goal, the chances are great that the student will achieve that goal.

The student in the classroom attends class and assignments and other academic expectations are communicated directly. Unlike the classroom student, the typical student studying by correspondence must maintain a high level of motivation and initiative. Essentially, the student enrolled in correspondence goes unreinforced until after the initial lesson is submitted and returned with feedback. By using a contract as an external prompting device, DiSilvestro believed the student would be more likely to start the course work promptly. "The contract offers a bridge between the educational worlds of external and self-motivation" (p. 218).

DiSilvestro selected the high school students and divided them into two groups: a contract group of 123 students and a non-contract group of 100 students. The contract stipulated that the students agreed to submit

the first lesson of the course within three weeks after receiving the course materials. In return, the Independent Study Division agreed to return the student's work within two and one-half weeks. The non-contract student group received no form of motivation. The date of the initial lesson and persistence to completion were tracked for each student for a one-year enrollment period.

DiSilvestro reported that of the 123 students in the contract group, 99 (80%) started their course work. In contrast, of the 100 students in the non-contract group, (62%) began work. In general, DiSilvestro concluded that:

1. Independent Study students who began their courses promptly persisted to course completion in greater numbers than those who delayed starting their courses.
2. Contracts had a pronounced effect in motivating students to begin work on their courses.
3. Contract groups showed slight, nonsignificant increases in completion of the course within a year of beginning it.
4. Contracting for an initial lesson is an effective method of increasing the ratio of starting to nonstarting students in correspondence study (pp. 218-220).

Hagen (1985) explored the implications of initiating a community high school in the West Fargo, North Dakota School District. The community high school was proposed as an alternative school setting for those students unable to achieve successfully in the traditional classroom.

Hagen notes that the alternative school which existed in the West Fargo School District prior to 1981 was intended primarily for adults seeking a high school education. Individuals who were functioning below grade eight in the basic skill areas and those adults preparing for General Educational Development (G.E.D.) made up the student enrollment.

The problem with the program, according to Hagen, was that there was no established way to serve the 16-year-old student who dropped out of high school. In order to solve this problem, the West Fargo Community High School opened in the fall of 1982. Under this program, a relationship was established with the Division of Independent Study, the state-supported correspondence high school in North Dakota. Under the plan, high school students who dropped out of West Fargo High School would have an alternative route to finish their education. According to Hagen,

> ... the Coordinator of Adult Education arranged for some of the young students to take courses by correspondence study through the Division. The courses were supervised by the Coordinator and the daily work was mailed to the Division for correction. The tests which were mailed from the Division were also administered by the Coordinator and then mailed back to the Division (p. 2).

Hagen makes several conclusions concerning the achievement and success of West Fargo students taking courses through this method:

1. The working relationship between the Community High School and the Division of Independent Study is beneficial to those students who would ordinarily drop out of school.
2. The close proximity between the Community High School and the Division allows students to receive quick feedback.
3. Community High School staff recommendations resulted in several Division courses being updated and modified to better meet the needs of the student.
4. Community High School staff recommendations resulted in several new courses being developed by the Division instructors.

Future of Correspondence Instruction

As the end of the twentieth century approaches, one of the greatest challenges facing high schools is offering a broad and varied curriculum to a diverse student population. Lower enrollments, increased per-pupil cost of programs, inadequate facilities, and a lack of certified personnel make this challenge especially difficult for the small school.

Alexander and Hines (1967) view the future of correspondence instruction with optimism. General acceptance of this method of instruction will be a gradual process, however. Alexander and Hines are quick to note that opposition to correspondence instruction needs to be effectively confronted. They cite several conditions that are essential for the future development and promotion of correspondence study, including the following:

1. The faculty of high schools must become interested in the use of correspondence as a viable alternative to the classroom.
2. High School faculty members must familiarize themselves with correspondence study.
3. Evaluative evidence as to the effects of correspondence study must be obtained.

Alexander and Hines conclude that when these steps

are integrated into the school setting, correspondence study will gain general acceptance "and thereby help education achieve its highest goal, a citizenry fully competent in the enterprise of learning" (p. 163).

McAfee (1973) believes that correspondence instruction has suffered in some ways "resulting from the fear that correspondence students will not learn as much as the student in the classroom" (p. 34). According to McAfee, that belief has to a great extent been laid to rest by findings that just the opposite is true. Controlled groups of students, some taking correspondence courses and others studying the same subject in the regular classroom, have demonstrated positive results for this method of instruction. McAfee further states:

> "... it would seem that the evidence favors the conclusion that supervised correspondence study is as valuable or perhaps a little more so than classroom attendance. This conclusion raises some interesting questions concerning the educational processes presently used in most high schools (p. 34).

McAfee summarizes his belief in correspondence instruction, citing that correspondence instruction is being used in high schools throughout the United States

in programs which range in scope from college preparatory to dropout prevention. "Through this method, schools can provide a wider variety and greater range of subjects in both the academic and vocational programs to students. The method is the correspondence course" (p. 34).

Barker and Logan (1985) note that correspondence study affords small high schools a means to enrich the curriculum without the additional cost of hiring more staff or utilizing other expensive technologies. "The use of approved correspondence courses holds great promise as an alternative to expand course offerings in small high schools at a fraction of the cost of advanced technologies or additional personnel" (p. 4).

Peterson (NUCEA, 1990) reports that correspondence courses may not be for every student, especially for those deficient in self-motivation and self-discipline. Logan points out, however, that independent study by correspondence is a viable alternative and "... that an education obtained in this way need not be inferior in any way; and that no one needs to apologize for having chosen that option" (p. 3).

Stone (1985) reported that schools in North Dakota could confidently enroll students in correspondence

study. In addition, schools that utilized correspondence study would enrich curriculum, resolve scheduling conflicts, and fulfill the diverse needs of the students. Stone notes that research indicates that students who enroll in correspondence study master subject matter equally as well as or better than those students who study in the regular classroom. Stone concludes by stating, "... correspondence schools of the future will hopefully integrate the new media, such as videotapes and computer-assisted instruction, with correspondence instruction, strengthening this alternative method of instruction" (p. 51).

Summary

This review of the literature presents a number of opinions and discussions relative to correspondence instruction. Many of the attitudes expressed indicate a generally favorable attitude toward this form of education. In the first half of the century, however, correspondence instruction was viewed with considerable pessimism by educators, administrators, and the public in general. In more recent years, the literature seems to point to an increasing acceptance for this alternative form of instruction.

Those who have conducted research in the area of correspondence study indicate that it provides schools

with curriculum enrichment and allows students to pursue an alternate route to educational opportunities.

Childs (1990) concludes that the major thrust of the research has been in attempting to find how well correspondence study served as a delivery system for education. Researchers have sought to determine whether correspondence instruction was a valid instrument in its own right or was it a device to be used only when necessary. Because classroom study is the accepted and most widely used instructional procedure, comparisons were usually made using classroom instruction. Over the years, according to Childs, a substantial body of evidence has been developed. Childs reports that "the general outcome of the most research projects was that of no significant difference" (p. 10).

In a March, 1990 address, Childs summarized his many years of research claiming that

> correspondence study is not uniquely and fundamentally different from any other general method of instruction. Any instructional procedure in which the general laws of human learning are adhered to will produce learning results equivalent to those produced by any other instructional procedure

which adheres to the same laws (p. 16).

The literature also shows that correspondence instruction seems to be gaining wider acceptance and popularity as schools struggle with smaller enrollments and fewer qualified personnel to fill positions for an increasingly diverse curriculum.

The literature reviewed supports the concept that achievement by students enrolled through correspondence is equal to or exceeds that of students studying in the regular classroom.

Research conducted by schools themselves lends support to the concept that correspondence study can successfully be integrated into the system. Schools such as Liberty High School (1981) in Spangle, WA, have proposed, implemented, and managed a comprehensive correspondence program since 1976. As a model, Liberty High School has provided courses to students unable to enroll in such courses in any other practical manner. With this model as an example, schools can confidently enroll students in correspondence study and anticipate successful achievement results.

Finally, the review of pertinent literature suggests that with the increasing utilization of new technologies such as videotapes and computer-assisted

instruction, advocates of correspondence study can look to a future with optimism.

Chapter III

METHODS

Introduction

This descriptive study was conducted to assess the perceptions students have toward the high school correspondence program of the North Dakota Division of Independent Study.

Description of the Population

The population for the survey included all 1175 students who enrolled in one or more courses at the Division of Independent Study between July 1, 1989 and September 30, 1989. A random sample of 235 students was mailed the survey instrument. The data derived from this group of students is meaningful to the administration and staff of the Division for the improvement of instruction and delivery of course materials.

Method

The instrument used to collect the data was a mailed questionnaire developed after reviewing several methods used by other individuals who had conducted similar studies. Dr. Dan King and Dr. William Woods of

the Department of Education at North Dakota State University and Robert Stone, Jr. and Kay Larson at the Division of Independent Study were consulted about the construction and distribution of the questionnaire. In its final form, the questionnaire was printed and prepared for distribution (See Appendix A for questionnaire). The 235 students were selected randomly by identifying every fifth name on the computer list of 1175 students. Following the random selection, each student was assigned a number from one to 235 which identified those questionnaires which would eventually be returned.

Data Analysis

For comparison all completed survey questionnaires were summarized and tabulated. Survey questionnaires would then be grouped according to the students' age, school of attendance, state of residence, and courses in which students were enrolled.

Each item on the questionnaire used in this research project was written to obtain opinions and information from the students. All items but three were designed as closed questions in order to obtain the necessary data while requiring a minimum of the students' time and effort.

The cover letter which accompanied the

questionnaire expressed the significance of the study and explained the importance of returning the form promptly. To insure the validity of the data, the students were told that all information would be confidential (See Appendix B for the Cover Letter).

The final 15-item survey was mailed to 235 students who enrolled in one or more correspondence courses at the Division of Independent Study between July 1, 1989 and September 30, 1989. To insure the validity and confidentiality of this research, respondents were to return the completed survey to the Division's Administrative Secretary in a self-addressed stamped envelope by March 23, 1990. In order to establish a higher return rate, a follow-up letter was mailed to non-respondents on March 23, 1990 (See Appendix C for the Follow-Up Letter).

The data derived from Question 1 was to be tabulated and ranked, according to the percentage of responses by students, for each reason for enrolling in correspondence study. Results from Questions 2 through 11 would be reported in two different ways. First, as percentages since the information gathered from this survey was descriptive and simple percentage presentation would best portray the data gathered; secondly, on a Likert scale to provide a graphic

picture of the students' perceptions. Raw data from Questions 2-7, 10, and 11 were analyzed by assigning a scale value to each of the three possible responses for each statement. Favorable responses toward correspondence instruction were assigned a value of 10; neutral responses toward correspondence instruction were assigned a value of 5; and unfavorable responses toward correspondence instruction were to be assigned a value of 0. The mean for each statement should then be computed and graphed on a Likert scale.

Data derived from Question 12 was to be tabulated and ranked, according to the percentage of responses by students, as to the difficulty of taking correspondence study.

Responses to open-ended Questions 13, 14, and 15 would be grouped and tabulated according to the percentage of responses by students into strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations of correspondence instruction.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Introduction

In order to better understand the attitudes and perceptions students have toward correspondence instruction, survey questionnaires were mailed to 235 students enrolled in one or more courses at the Division of Independent Study. One hundred forty-two (60%) students returned their surveys. Although questionnaires were originally sent to 235 students, five were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. Thus, a sample of 230 students actually received the questionnaire. The 142 completed and returned questionnaires represents a 62% return rate.

Some of the surveys returned by the students had several or all of the questions unanswered. For this reason, a variation in "N" indicated on the tables will vary between questions.

Age of Students

The ages of the students responding to the survey questionnaire closely resembled the Division's student population in general. According to the 1988-89 Annual

Report, 4035 (91%) of the Division's students were between the ages of 14 and 18. One hundred twenty-two (86%) of the students responding to this research study were between the ages of 14 and 18. Table 1 indicates the ages of the students in this research.

Table 1

Age of Students N = 142

Age	N	Percent
14	4	2.82
15	14	9.86
16	19	13.39
17	43	30.28
18	42	29.58
19	10	7.04
20	3	2.11
21	1	.70
37	1	.70
49	1	.70
53	2	1.41
Not Given	2	1.41

Students' Schools

Students were asked to indicate the school they currently attended. Eighty-four private and public

high schools and three colleges in 10 states were listed. In addition, 34 questionnaires were returned with no school listed. Several schools had more than one student responding to the survey. (See Appendix D for schools represented in the survey.)

Students' Residence by State

The 142 students responding were residents of 13 different states with the majority (61.28%) being from North Dakota. Fourteen (9.86%) students were residents of Montana. Another 11 (7.75%) respondents were from Minnesota. The remaining 26 (18.29%) students resided in 10 other states. Four (2.82%) students did not list a state of residence. Table 2 shows the number and percentage of respondents from each state.

Courses Currently Enrolled

Students responding to this survey research were asked to list the course or courses they were currently taking. The 142 students accounted for 167 individual course enrollments in 71 different Division of Independent Study subjects. The 71 subjects represent 53.79% of the offerings of the Division. (See Appendix E for individual courses and number of survey respondents enrolled in each.)

Table 2

Students' Residence by State N = 142

State	N	Percent
North Dakota	87	61.28
Montana	14	9.86
Minnesota	11	7.75
Washington	7	4.92
Colorado	5	3.52
Wisconsin	4	2.82
Wyoming	2	1.41
South Dakota	2	1.41
Idaho	2	1.41
Florida	1	.70
Alaska	1	.70
Tennessee	1	.70
New York	1	.70
State Not Given	4	2.82

Question 1

Students enroll in correspondence courses for a variety of reasons. What is the main reason you enrolled in correspondence study?

Table 3 illustrates the results. Of the 154 responses a majority of students enrolled in courses for a variety of reasons. Thirty-four (22.08%) students enrolled to earn a high school diploma; 29 (18.83%) to take a course not offered locally; 28 (18.18%) to take a course because of a scheduling conflict in school; 26 (16.88%) to repeat a course failed in the local school; 18 (11.69%) to take a course of special interest; and four (2.59%) to take classes because of a handicap or being homebound.

In addition to the choices listed on the questionnaire, students volunteered other reasons for enrolling in correspondence courses. Seven (4.55%) students enrolled in order to earn enough credits to graduate from high school early; two (1.30%) to get a head start in college; two (1.30%) to learn to drive; and one (.65%) to learn a foreign language. Three (1.95%) students did not indicate a reason for enrolling.

Question 2.

In your opinion, how do correspondence courses compare in difficulty with those you have taken in the regular classroom?

Forty-seven (33.10%) of the students thought

Table 3

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 1: Reasons for Enrolling in Correspondence Study

	Student Responses (N = 154)	
	N	Percent
1. To earn a high school diploma	34	22.08
2. To take a course not offered in the local school	29	18.83
3. To take courses because of a scheduling conflict	28	18.18
4. To repeat a course failed in the local school	26	16.88
5. To take a course of special interest	18	11.69
6. To take classes because of a handicap or being homebound	4	2.59
7. Others		
a. To graduate early	7	4.55
b. To get a head start at college	2	1.30
c. To learn to drive	2	1.30

	Student Responses	
	N = 154	
	N	Percent
d. To learn a foreign language	1	.65
8. No response	3	1.95

correspondence courses were more difficult than those they experienced in the traditional classroom. Twenty-eight (19.72%) students viewed correspondence courses as being easier than regular classroom study. The largest group of students, on the other hand, 61 (42.96%) noted that correspondence courses and the regular classroom were about equal in difficulty. Six (4.22%) students did not respond to the question. Table 4 illustrates the results.

Question 3.

In your opinion, how do you rate the quality of supervision you have received on the local level?

Table 5 shows that most students viewed local supervision to be at least adequate or excellent. Sixty (42.25%) students believed the quality of local

Table 4

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 2: The Difficulty of Correspondence Courses Compared to Regular Classroom Courses

	Student Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. Correspondence courses are more difficult.	47	33.10
2. Correspondence courses are about equal in difficulty.	61	42.96
3. Correspondence courses are easier.	28	19.72
4. No response	6	4.22

supervision was excellent. An additional 64 (45.07%) of the students thought supervision was adequate. Only 13 (9.16%) students indicated that local supervision was poor. Five (3.52%) students did not respond to this survey question.

Table 5

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 3: The Quality of Supervision at the local Level

	Student Responses (N = 142)	
	N	Percent
1. The quality of supervision is excellent.	60	42.25
2. The quality of supervision is adequate.	64	45.07
3. The quality of supervision is poor.	13	9.16
4. No response	5	3.52

Question 4.

In your opinion, how do grades you earn through correspondence compare with the grades you earn in the classroom?

In Table 6 the data shows that 33 (23.24%) students believed grades earned through correspondence were higher than those earned in the traditional classroom. Seventy-eight (54.93%) of the respondents

Table 6

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 4: Comparison of Grades Earned by Correspondence and Those in the Traditional Classroom

	Student Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. The correspondence grades are higher.	33	23.24
2. The correspondence grades are about the same.	78	54.93
3. The correspondence grades are lower.	27	19.01
4. No response	4	2.82

indicated that the correspondence grades were about the same as regular school grades. Twenty-seven (19.01%) noted that correspondence grades were lower than those earned in the local school. Again, four (2.82%) students did not respond to the question.

Question 5.

Since you do not have direct contact with the Division instructor, the assignments, instructions, and

lesson objectives listed in the study guide and student worksheets are especially important. In your opinion, how would you rate the lesson assignments?

Table 7 shows that 65 (45.77%) students felt that lesson assignments were easily understood. Sixty-one (42.96%) students noted that lesson assignments were adequately clear and understood. On the other hand, only 12 (8.45%) students believed lesson assignments were unclear. Four (2.82%) students did not respond to the question.

Table 7

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 5: The Clarity of Lesson Assignments in the Student Written Work

	Student Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. Lesson assignments are easily understood.	65	45.77
2. Lesson assignments are adequately clear.	61	42.96
3. Lesson assignments unclear.	12	8.45
4. No response	4	2.82

Question 6.

In your opinion, how would you rate the instructions for the course and lesson assignments?

Table 8 illustrates the data. Of the 142 respondents, 68 (47.89%) students thought instructions expressed in the study guide and student worksheets were easily understood. Sixty-three (44.37%) students believed instructions were adequately clear. Eight (5.63%) students perceived the instructions in the student material as unclear. Three (2.11%) students did not respond to this questionnaire item.

Question 7.

In your opinion, how would you rate the lesson objectives for lesson?

Sixty-eight (47.89%) students expressed a belief that lesson objectives were easily understood. Another 63 (44.37%) noted that lesson objectives were adequately clear. Similar to responses in Questions 7 and 8, only seven (4.92%) students felt that the objectives were unclear. Four (2.82%) students did not respond. The results are indicated in Table 9.

Question 8.

In your opinion, how do you rate the appropriateness of questions asked in the written work?

Table 8

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 6: The Clarity of Lesson Instructions in the Student Written Work

	Student Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. Instructions are easily understood.	68	47.89
2. Instructions are adequately clear.	63	44.37
3. Instructions are unclear.	8	5.63
4. No response	3	2.11

Table 10 reveals the results. Only eight (5.63%) students expressed that there were too many objective questions in the written work. A majority, 107 (75.35%) of the students felt there was a good mixture of objective and subjective questions in the written work. Twenty-three (16.20%) students believed there were too many subjective questions. Four (2.82%) students did not respond to item 8.

Table 9

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 7: The Clarity of Lesson Objectives in the Student Written Work

	Student Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. Lesson objectives are easily understood.	68	47.89
2. Lesson objectives are adequately clear.	63	44.37
3. Lesson objectives are unclear.	7	4.92
4. No response	4	2.82

Question 9.

In your opinion, how do you rate the amount of written work you are required to submit to the Division?

In Table 11 the results show that 12 (8.45%) students perceived the amount of written work involved in correspondence courses to be too much. A large number, 121 (85.21%) believed that the amount of

Table 10

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 8: The Appropriateness of Questions Asked in the Student Written Work

	Student Responses N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. There are too many objective questions.	8	5.63
2. There is a good mixture of objective and subjective questions.	107	75.35
3. There are too many subjective questions.	23	16.20
4. No response	4	2.82

written work in correspondence study was about right. Five (3.52%) students felt that there wasn't enough written work in correspondence study and four (2.82%) did not respond to this inquiry.

Question 10.

In your opinion, how do you rate the quality of instruction given to you by Division teachers?

Table 11

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 9: The Amount of Written Work Submitted to the Division

	Student Responses N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. The amount of written work is too much.	12	8.45
2. The amount of written work is about right.	121	85.21
3. The amount of written work is not enough.	5	3.52
4. No response	4	2.82

Students responded favorably to the quality of instruction they received from Division instructors. The numbers and percentages are similar to students' perceptions of local supervision. The largest number, 81 (57.04%) of the students, believed the quality of instruction was excellent. Fifty-three (37.33%) viewed instruction as adequate. Five (3.52%) students felt the quality of instruction was poor. Three (2.11%) students did not respond. Table 12 shows the data.

Table 12

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 10: The Quality of Instruction Given by Division Teachers

	Student Responses (N = 142)	
	N	Percent
1. The quality of instruction is excellent.	81	57.04
2. The quality of instruction is adequate.	53	37.33
3. The quality of instruction is poor.	5	3.52
4. No response.	3	2.11

Question 11.

In your opinion, how do you rate the lesson turn-around time?

An important aspect of correspondence instruction is prompt return of feedback to the student. For the purposes of this research, a fast turn-around time of

lessons was considered to be three days. An adequate turn-around time was determined to be less than one week and a slow turn-around time was more than one week. Table 13 illustrates that 26 (8.31%) students rated the turn-around time of lessons as fast. Seventy-one (50.00%) students believed the turn-around time was adequate. Forty (28.17%) students indicated the turn-around time was slow. Five (3.52%) students did not respond.

Table 13

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 11: The Turn-Around Time of Lessons

	Students Responses	
	N = 142	
	N	Percent
1. The turn-around time of lessons is fast.	26	18.31
2. The turn-around time of lessons is adequate.	71	50.00
3. The turn-around time of lessons is slow.	40	28.17
4. No response	5	3.52

Question 12.

In your opinion, what is the most difficult aspect of correspondence study?

According to students responding to the survey questionnaire, a number of difficulties arise as correspondence courses are completed. Many students responded to this inquiry by checking more than one choice. The data in Table 14 shows that 80 (42.55%) students lacked motivation to finish the course; 54 (28.72%) missed direct contact with the Division teacher; 21 (11.17%) worked harder than in the regular classroom; and 15 (7.98%) lacked adequate local supervision. Two (1.06%) students did not cite a difficulty involved with correspondence study.

Students suggested other difficulties encountered in studying by correspondence. Six (3.19%) students lacked adequate time to schedule tests; four (2.13%) found studying for the tests to be difficult; three (1.60%) noted it was difficult to answer test questions based on material not covered in lesson assignments; two (1.06%) indicated that lesson instructions and instructions given by the Division teacher were unclear; and one (.54%) believed lengthy reading assignments made correspondence study difficult.

Table 14

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 12: The Most Difficult Aspects of Correspondence Study

	Student Responses (N = 188)	
	N	Percent
1. Being motivated to finish the course	80	42.55
2. Lacking direct contact with the Division teacher	54	28.72
3. Working harder than in the regular classroom	21	11.17
4. Lacking adequate local supervision	15	7.98
5. Others		
a. Lacking adequate time to schedule tests	6	3.19
b. Studying for tests as difficult	4	2.13
c. Answering test questions based on material not covered in lesson assignments	3	1.60

	Student Responses	
	N = 188	
	N	Percent
d. Understanding lesson instructions and instructions from Division teachers	2	1.06
e. Reading lengthy assignments	1	.54
6. No response	2	1.06

Question 13.

What opinions and comments do you have regarding the advantages of taking correspondence courses rather than studying in the classroom?

Students' responses to Questions 13, 14, and 15 were grouped and ranked in order of importance and percentage of response. One hundred eighteen (83.10%) responded to open-ended Question 13. The responses were useful in evaluating advantages of correspondence instruction viewed by students. Sixty-three (53.39%) students responding to this question believed working at their own pace was the greatest advantage of

correspondence instruction. Another 18 (15.25%) students noted that correspondence instruction offered an opportunity for students to take courses not offered in the local school. Six (5.08%) students felt correspondence taught self-discipline. Five (4.23%) students indicated that correspondence helped avoid scheduling conflicts in school.

In addition to the advantages listed by the majority of students, other responses were volunteered. Four (3.38%) felt correspondence helped them earn a high school diploma. Three (2.54%) students noted correspondence was an option to avoid a teacher they disliked in the local school; three (2.54%) mentioned correspondence as an alternative to summer school; and three (2.54%) believed correspondence helped specialized needs of students. Two (1.70%) mentioned either preparation for college, or praise for student written work as advantages. There were nine other advantages which were listed by students. These responses and all others are illustrated in Table 15.

Question 14.

What opinions and comments do you have regarding the disadvantages of taking correspondence courses rather than studying in the classroom?

One hundred twenty-three (86.62%) students responding to this research study cited disadvantages to correspondence instruction. Fifty-four (43.90%) students noted the lack of direct contact with the Division instructor as the greatest disadvantage. Twenty-three (18.70%) students thought that lack of motivation on their part was a disadvantage to studying by this method. Difficulty with getting questions answered was given as a disadvantage by 12 (9.75%) students. Nine (7.31%) indicated a slow turn-around time of lessons. Five (4.07%) students missed the social contact of other students.

Three (2.44%) responses each concerned difficulty in finding time to do lessons, lack of corrections and explanations on assignments, and the cost of correspondence as disadvantages of this form of instruction. These and seven other disadvantages are shown in Table 16.

Question 15.

What comments and suggestions do you have for improving or enhancing correspondence instruction?

Since students were allowed to comment or recommend in response to this question, some responses were positive while others were negative. Ninety-two (64.79%) students responded to this inquiry. Table 17

lists the responses according to the percentage of similar responses. A frequent response of students was that the Division was providing a good program of instruction. Twenty-three (25.00%) students indicated satisfaction with the instruction and would recommend the program to other students. Twelve (13.04%) students recommended improved test construction and evaluation. Eleven (11.95%) students commented that directions in student work should be easier to understand and follow. The need for improved local supervision was cited by seven (7.60%) students. Another seven (7.60%) students believed it would be helpful for the Division to install a toll-free telephone service. Seven (7.60%) students urged more written comments on returned lesson wrappers.

Five (5.43%) students suggested prompter return of lessons. The need to update lesson material was listed by four (4.35%) students. Two (2.17%) students would like to have a photo of their instructor. Finally, 14 other comments and recommendations are listed in Table 17.

Scale 1 illustrates on a Likert scale the mean scores of students computed from raw data from Questions 2-7, 10, and 11. The mean for each question

Table 15

Number and Percentage of Students Responses to Item 13: Advantages of Correspondence Instruction

	Advantages	Student Responses N = 118	
		N	Percent
1.	"Working at my own pace is nice." "You can go at your own speed. You don't have to plod through the material slowly just because others may have to." "I can take my own time on each lesson."	63	53.39
2.	"Students can receive credit for courses not offered in the local school." "Correspondence courses provide an excellent opportunity for students to take courses not offered in their school."	18	15.25
3.	Correspondence teaches self-discipline. "I felt correspondence was very difficult, but when I was done, I felt a real big feeling of self-satisfaction. Correspondence makes you demand something more of yourself."	6	5.08

Advantages	Student Responses N = 118	
	N	Percent
4. Taking correspondence "...helps avoid scheduling conflicts in school." "Correspondence courses give the student the chance to take classes they otherwise may not be able to take."	5	4.23
5. By taking correspondence, "I can work full time and still earn my diploma."	4	3.38
6. Correspondence is "... an option when you don't get along with the teacher who teaches the class in school."	3	2.54
7. Studying by correspondence allows the student to "... avoid summer school."	3	2.54
8. "You get to learn more things which are specialized to your interests and needs."	3	2.54
9. "I enjoy the nice praise received on returned assignments."	2	1.70

Advantages	Student Responses N = 118	
	N	Percent
10. Correspondence "... prepares students for college." "I think this is a good preparation for students before entering college."	2	1.70
11. Correspondence is challenging. "It motivates the student to complete his or her course."	1	.85
12. Correspondence "increases responsibility."	1	.85
13. "I like the relaxed approach to learning."	1	.85
14. It is "...fun having a teacher in Fargo."	1	.85
15. "In U.S. History, you finish the book. In a classroom you usually don't.	1	.85
16. Correspondence is "... one on one learning."	1	.85
17. In correspondence "... you have to read, not just listen to lecture all day."	1	.85

Advantages	Student Responses N = 118	
	N	Percent
18. "I'm glad North Dakota has something like this to offer its citizens and neighboring states."	1	.85
19. Correspondence "... is faster."	1	.85

Table 16

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 14: Disadvantages of Correspondence Instruction

Disadvantages	Student Responses N = 123	
	N	Percent
1. There is no direct contact with the teacher. "You don't have a teacher available if you have a quick question."		

	Disadvantages	Student Responses N = 123	
		N	Percent
	"The only disadvantage is if you don't understand something you have no teacher to help you with it." "In correspondence, the teacher isn't available in answering a difficult question. In Spanish, it's sometimes hard to go on your own instincts."	54	43.90
2.	Motivation to finish the work is difficult. "Often times, I am not disciplined enough to finish my assignments." "I had trouble getting my lessons in on time as I am a procrastinator."	23	18.70
3.	"It is difficult to get questions answered." "It is a little harder because the teacher doesn't explain my mistakes." "Better correcting. When a Mistake is made, there should be an explanation." "The explanations were not clear enough to do the		

Disadvantages	Student Responses N = 123	
	N	Percent
lessons, and the instructor was rarely there to answer questions."	12	9.75
4. The turn-around time is slow. "Very slow turn-around time. There was no feedback."	9	7.31
5. Not having other students around. "The only disadvantage is that no students are around you." "You don't get to talk with other students about the subject."	5	4.07
6. It was "...difficult finding time to do the work."	3	2.44
7. "More explanations with the corrections are needed in correspondence." "When a concept is not understood, it is hard to finish the work. Often this cannot be explained on paper by the teacher."	3	2.44

Disadvantages	Student Responses N = 123	
	N	Percent
8. Correspondence "... costs too much."	3	2.44
9. "Not having a supervisor who is knowledgeable in the subject area."	2	1.63
10. "Some questions asked on worksheets aren't in the book."	2	1.63
11. Correspondence "...is a lot more work."	2	1.63
12. "Division grades are harder."	2	1.63
13. There is "...too much material covered on the tests."	1	.81
14. It is difficult "...to go to school to take the tests."	1	.81
15. "It would be nice to see what was wrong on the tests."	1	.81

Table 17

Number and Percentage of Students' Responses to Item 15: Comments and Recommendations concerning Correspondence Instruction

Comments and Recommendations	Student Responses N = 92	
	N	Percent
1. Keep up the good work. "I think it is a good study program." "I would recommend this program to anyone who needed to take this type of class." "I am well satisfied with your correspondence program." "I believe you are doing a great job and the material and lessons are just fine." "I feel you are doing a fine job. I'm learning more with this course than I would in the classroom." "I wish I could take all my classes by correspondence."	23	25.00
2. "Instructors should provide review sheets for tests." "Students should be able to see what they did wrong on tests." "Take out opinion questions. They can't be marked wrong." "Test questions should be based on the reading assignment." "Too many essay questions."	12	13.04

Comments and Recommendations	Student Responses N = 92	
	N	Percent
3. Make directions easier to follow. "To make instructions clearer." "Explain some directions and sections in greater detail."	11	11.95
4. Local supervision needs improvement. "Make sure the supervisor knows something about the course being supervised." "More interest from the supervisor to see you are doing OK."	7	7.60
5. "I believe it would be great to have a phone number to call." "Toll-free telephone access to the instructor may be helpful." "Maybe you could have a telephone number the students could call if they have questions about a lesson."	7	7.60
6. "There should be more written comments from the teacher to the student." "Teachers should correct lessons more carefully."		

Comments and Recommendations	Student Responses N = 92	
	N	Percent
"Better grading, don't be so tough."	7	7.60
7. There should be "... faster return of lesson and test results." "I assume you all work very hard, and are as speedy as possible, but it would be nice to receive the lessons back faster."	5	5.43
8. "Worksheets need to be updated." "All of the written explanations and assignments should be checked and re-checked for any mistakes." "The book is from 1987 and the worksheets are from 1978."	4	4.35
9. "A picture of the teacher could be enclosed in each course."	2	2.17
10. "It has helped me and a few of my friends."	1	1.09
11. "I don't think there is a good substitute for the classroom teacher."	1	1.09

Comments and Recommendations	Student Responses N = 92	
	N	Percent
12. "A tuition agreement with Montana would be nice."	1	1.09
13. "The teacher was rude and extremely slow in returning lessons and tests. The grading was too strict for a high school student. We never saw what we did wrong on tests. It was the worst class and I had the worst instructor of any class I have ever taken."	1	1.09
14. "'Well done' and 'Good Work' written on my returned lessons always brightens my day."	1	1.09
15. "Let local schools know that correspondence courses are no breeze to complete."	1	1.09
16. "Some lessons are too long."	1	1.09
17. "Lengthen the time period to complete a course by two or three months."	1	1.09

Comments and Recommendations	Student Responses N = 92	
	N	Percent
18. "A video tape of instructions like the classroom would be helpful."	1	1.09
19. "Lessons should be sent directly to the student."	1	1.09
20. "There should be more courses by computer."	1	1.09
21. "Chapter assignments should count for one-third of the final grade."	1	1.09
22. "The one suggestion I have for improving correspondence instruction is that questions pertaining to the reading are not rewritten statements from the textbook."	1	1.09
23. "I do feel that in the catalog courses, the recommended ages for those taking the courses should be labeled."	1	1.09

was computed by assigning a value of 10 to the positive response toward correspondence instruction, a value of 5 to the neutral response, and a value of 0 to the unfavorable response. The total was divided by the number of respondents to the question.

The means for Questions 2 through 7, and 10 were about 5.0 revealing a positive perception by students for these areas of correspondence instruction. Question 11, which concerned turn-around time of lessons, shows a mean score of 4.3.

The difficulty of correspondence instruction was the topic of Question 2., The mean score to this question was 5.5. Question 4 concerned correspondence grades. The mean for this question was 5.1.

Question 5 relates to the quality of local supervision. The mean score for this item was 6.5. On the other hand, Question 10 deals with the quality of Division instruction and the mean score here was 7.6.

Clarity of lesson assignments, instructions, and objectives were the topics of Questions 5, 6, and 7. Question 5 covered clarity of lesson assignments and the mean score was 6.6. Questions 6 and 7 concerned lesson instructions and objectives and the mean score for both items was 7.0.

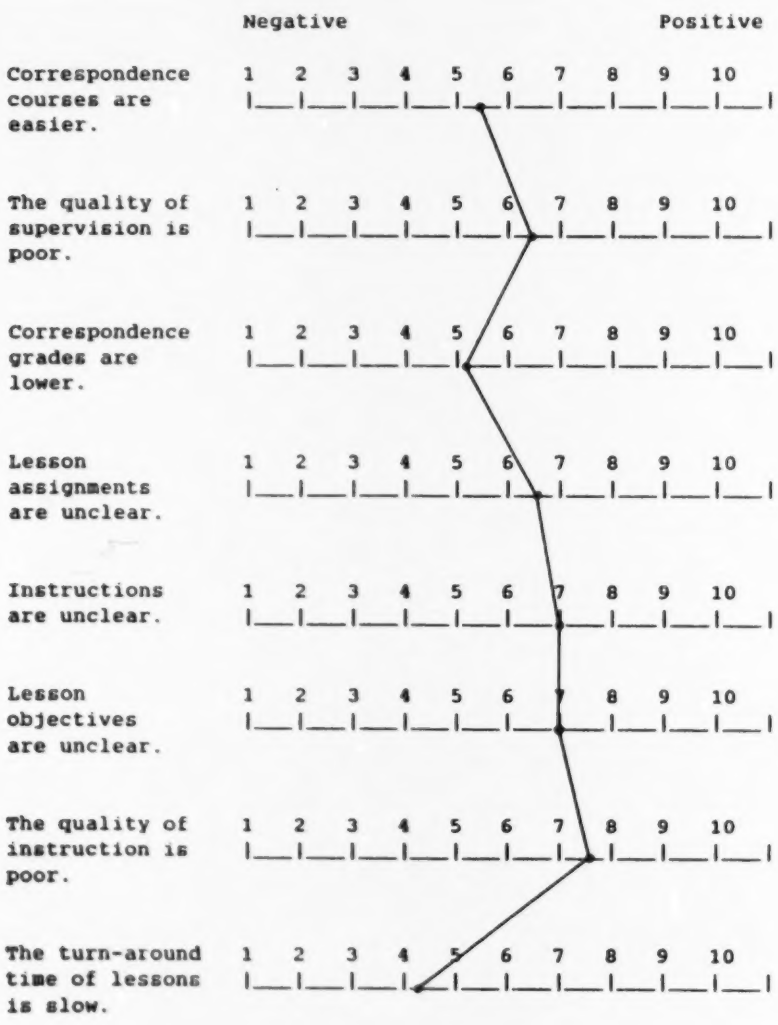
Of the questions illustrated in Scale 1, only Question 11 reveals a less than favorable attitude of

Scale 1

Means of Students' Responses to Items 2-7, 10, and 11:

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENT RESPONSES

N = 142


Negative
Positive
Correspondence courses are easier.
Correspondence courses are harder.
The quality of supervision is poor.
The quality of supervision is excellent.
Correspondence grades are lower.
Correspondence grades are higher.
Lesson assignments are unclear.
Lesson assignments are clear.
Instructions are unclear.
Instructions are clear.
Lesson objectives are unclear.
Lesson objectives are unclear.
The quality of instruction is poor.
The quality of instruction is excellent.
The turn-around time of lessons is slow.
The turn-around time of lessons slow.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

students toward correspondence instruction. The mean on Question 11 which dealt with turn-around time of lessons was 4.3.

The researcher chose not to include the data from Questions 8 and 9 in Scale 1 since the choice of an unfavorable option to these questions was a matter of individual interpretation.

Discussion of the Results

Students responding to this research study indicated a general satisfaction with correspondence instruction as offered by the Division of Independent Study. These students enrolled in correspondence study for a variety of the traditional reasons including to earn a high school diploma; to take a course not offered in the local school; to take courses because of a scheduling conflict; and to repeat a course failed in the local school. The reasons given by respondents for enrolling in correspondence courses are supported by earlier research studies.

Students frequently mentioned that working at their own pace was a major advantage in taking correspondence courses. This seems to support the concept of independent study and the traditional reasons for the existence of correspondence instruction.

Students identified several weaknesses of correspondence instruction. The major weakness, according to the students responding, was the turn-around time of lesson and test work. Twenty-eight percent of the students responding to this research believed the turn-around time of lessons and tests was slow. This researcher notes the significance of this number since a prompt feedback of results is important to any successful educational program. Further, this item on the questionnaire was the only one to receive a negative response from the students.

Development of course materials is an important aspect of each Division instructor's job description and standard of performance. The research notes that a high percentage of students believed that the lesson assignments, instructions, and objectives were at least adequately clear. On the other hand, individual responses to Questions 14, and 15 indicate that some students felt that teachers, in certain instances, provided unclear explanations for errors made in the student's work. Although the researcher notes the general satisfaction of students with the course materials, these individual responses are an area of concern.

The researcher was pleased and surprised by the high percentage of students who volunteered a response to open-ended Questions 13, 14, and 15. One hundred thirty-six (96%) responded to at least one of the questions, and many students wrote comments several sentences in length. The large number of responses to these items provided the researcher with helpful and informative data for drawing conclusions and recommendations.

One deficiency in the construction of the questionnaire was noted as results were tabulated. Unlike Questions 2-7, 10, and 11, Questions 8 and 9 did not provide the student with a negative response option. Whether there are too many objective or subjective questions in the lesson work, or whether the amount of written work was too much or not enough, was a matter of individual interpretation. As a result, these two items were not included in Scale 1. Future researchers should note this deficiency in questionnaire construction.

Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of students currently enrolled in one or more courses at the Division of Independent Study. Students were asked to relate and compare experiences in the regular classroom with those of correspondence instruction. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Students enroll in correspondence courses for a variety of reasons. What was the main reason students enrolled in correspondence study?
2. How do correspondence courses compare in difficulty with those taken in the regular classroom?
3. How do students rate the quality of supervision received on the local level?
4. How do correspondence students compare grades earned with those earned in the regular classroom?
5. How do students rate the clarity of assignments, instructions, and objectives included in the course work?

6. How do students rate the appropriateness of questions asked in the written work?

7. How do students perceive the amount of written work required in correspondence courses?

8. What is the quality of Division instruction?

9. How do students rate the turn-around time of lessons?

10. What do students consider to be the most difficult aspect of correspondence study?

11. What advantages, disadvantages, and comments do students have concerning correspondence study?

The survey was mailed to 235 students. The survey instrument was returned by 142 (62%) students representing 84 public and private high schools and colleges in 10 states. The 142 students were enrolled in 71 different Division of Independent Study courses.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are based on the data derived from the research.

1. The ages of the students responding to the survey questionnaire closely resembled the Division of Independent Study's student population in general. One hundred twenty-two (86%) students were between the ages of 14 and 18.

2. Students enrolled in correspondence courses

for a variety of reasons including to earn a diploma, to take a course not offered in the local school, and to repeat a course failed in school.

3. According to the students, a majority believe correspondence courses are equal to or more difficult than courses in the regular classroom.

4. A large percentage of students felt that the quality of supervision was adequate or excellent.

5. Students believed grades earned through correspondence and the regular classroom were about the same.

6. A majority of students indicated that the lesson assignments, instructions, and objectives listed in the study guide and student worksheets were adequately clear and easily understood.

7. Most students believed that questions asked in the student written work were appropriate and that there was a good mixture of objective and subjective questions.

8. A large number of students felt that the amount of written work in correspondence instruction was about right.

9. The largest number of students responding to the survey viewed the quality of instruction to be excellent or adequate.

10. A majority of students indicated that the turn-around time of lessons was adequate to slow.

11. A large number of students indicated that being motivated to finish the course, lacking direct contact with the Division teacher, working harder than in the regular classroom, and lacking adequate local supervision were difficult aspects of correspondence instruction.

12. Students indicated that there were many advantages to correspondence instruction. Working at an individual pace, avoiding scheduling conflicts in the local school, and taking courses not offered locally were frequently mentioned as advantages of this form of educational alternative.

13. According to the students, there were disadvantages to correspondence instruction as well. Lacking direct contact with the Division instructor was mentioned most often. In addition, lack of motivation to finish the course, difficulty in having questions answered, and the slow turn-around time of lessons were also discussed as disadvantages of correspondence instruction.

14. Students suggested a number of comments and suggestions toward the improvement of correspondence instruction. These comments and suggestions proved to

be especially important since students were allowed to vent frustrations, as well as compliment correspondence instruction. The largest number of students believed that correspondence was a satisfactory method of instruction. On the other hand, students indicated frustration with test construction and evaluation, clarity of instructions, local supervision, and the turn-around time of lesson work.

Recommendations

1. The Division should continue to strive for the most effective and efficient delivery system for correspondence instruction.

2. State funding of the high school correspondence program, as offered through the Division of Independent Study, should be increased in order to maintain the needs of the students it serves.

3. The administration should seek appropriate funding for the purpose of a curriculum coordinator position.

4. Division administrators and teachers need to increase attempts to speed lesson return time by installing a FAX machine.

5. A plan to install an 800 telephone number for student use needs to be a priority.

6. The Division needs to develop a plan to

systematically gather data regarding student perception of correspondence instruction.

7. As a standing entity, the Division curriculum committee should actively evaluate course offerings periodically and recommend additions and revisions.

8. The Division's principal should conduct in-service workshops for teachers to improve course writing, lesson comments, and other related tasks.

9. The Division administration needs to insure that course materials are properly proofed and continually updated by identifying one staff person to maintain this standard.

10. Division administrators, teachers, and staff need to make every attempt to insure that course materials are developed with clearly stated assignments, instructions, and objectives.

11. Teachers should continue to evaluate student lesson and test work in a prompt and efficient manner.

12. Course materials supplemented by videos and computer-assisted programs should be encouraged.

13. The evaluation of student lesson and test work should be done in a prompt and efficient manner.

14. Division teachers should be encouraged to continue to evaluate student lesson and test work by clearly identifying errors and providing explanations

for them.

15. The Division teachers need to provide lesson comments which are instructional, helpful, praising, and encouraging in nature.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT EVALUATION OF CORRESPONDENCE INSTRUCTION

DIVISION OF INDEPENDENT STUDY

AGE _____ SCHOOL (If Attending) _____ STATE _____

DIVISION COURSE CURRENTLY ENROLLED _____

OTHER DIVISION COURSES TAKEN _____

DIRECTIONS: Unless otherwise stated, please check ( ) one answer for each question.

1. Students enroll in correspondence courses for a variety of reasons. Check the main reason you enrolled in correspondence study.

   ____ To take a course not offered in the local school.

   ____ To take a course of special interest.

   ____ To repeat a course failed in the local school.

   ____ To take a course because of a scheduling conflict in school.

   ____ Unable to take regular classes because of a handicap or being homebound.

   ____ An adult needing credit to earn a high school diploma.

   ____ Other (please specify) _____

2. In your opinion, how do correspondence courses compare in difficulty with those you have taken in the regular classroom?

   ____ Correspondence courses are more difficult.

   ____ Correspondence courses are about equal in difficulty.

   ____ Correspondence courses are easier.

3. The supervisor is the person in the local school or community assigned to administer tests and provide assistance for the student. In your opinion, how do you rate the quality of supervision you have received on the local level?

   ____ The quality of supervision is excellent.

   ____ The quality of supervision is adequate.

   ____ The quality of supervision is poor.

4. In your opinion, how do grades you earn through correspondence compare with the grades you earn in the classroom?

____ The correspondence grades are higher.

____ The correspondence grades are about the same.

____ The correspondence grades are lower.

5. Since you do not have direct contact with the Division instructor, assignments, instructions, and lesson objectives listed in the study guide and student worksheets are very important. In your opinion, how would you rate the lesson assignments?

____ Lesson assignments are clearly understood.

____ Lesson assignments are adequate.

____ Lesson assignments are unclear.

6. In your opinion, how would you rate the instructions for the course and lesson assignments?

____ Instructions are clearly understood.

____ Instructions are adequate.

____ Instructions are unclear.

7. In your opinion, how would you rate the lesson objectives for lessons?

____ Lesson objectives are clearly understood.

____ Lesson objectives are adequate.

____ Lesson objectives are unclear.

8. Lesson work consists of several types of questions. Some lessons may contain objective questions (multiple choice, true and false, matching, etc.) and other lessons may contain subjective questions (short answer and essay). In your opinion, how do you rate the types of questions asked in the written work?

____ There are too many objective questions.

____ There is a good mixture of objective and subjective questions.

____ There are too many subjective questions.

9. In your opinion, how do you rate the amount of written work you are required to submit to the Division?

____ The amount of written work is too much.

____ The amount of written work is about right.

____ The amount of written work is not enough.

10. The Division instructor evaluates lesson and test work by making corrections, providing additional helpful information, and writes comments and explanations on the student work. In your opinion, how do you rate the quality of instruction given to you by Division teachers?

____ The quality of instruction is excellent.

____ The quality of instruction is adequate.

____ The quality of instruction is poor.

11. The turn-around time of lesson work is the time between when you mail your lesson and when the evaluated work is returned to you with a grade and comments. In your opinion, how do you rate the turn-around time?

____ The turn-around time of lessons is fast.

____ The turn-around time of lessons is adequate.

____ The turn-around time of lessons is slow.

12. In your opinion, what is the most difficult aspect of correspondence study? (Check one or more answers)

____ Motivation to finish the course

____ Staying on task

____ Lack of direct contact with the teacher

____ More work than the regular classroom

____ Lack of local supervision

____ Others (please specify) _____

(QUESTIONS 13 & 14 ON THE BACK)

13. What opinions and comments do you have regarding the advantages of taking correspondence courses rather than studying in the classroom?

14. What opinions and comments do you have regarding the disadvantages of taking correspondence courses rather than studying in the classroom?

RETURN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE ENCLOSED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE TO:

Neil D. Howe
Box 5036 - State University Station
Fargo, North Dakota 58105-5036

APPENDIX B

Box 5036 - State University Station
Fargo, North Dakota 58105
March 5, 1990

Dear Division Student:

Would you participate in a study of student perception of correspondence study? I am attempting to obtain the opinions and comments of students enrolled in correspondence courses through the Division of Independent Study. I am interested in your responses to the attached questionnaire that asks questions concerning aspects of the program offered by the Division.

Participation in the survey is completely voluntary. All replies are confidential and no individual student will be identified in the report of the data. The data is only needed as a basis for making general conclusions. Results of this questionnaire are expected to reflect the current status and concerns students have concerning supervised correspondence instruction. The general conclusions will be useful to me as principal of the Division of Independent Study as well as to the director, Robert Stone, Jr., and the Department of Public Instruction in evaluating the role the Division is playing in correspondence instruction. The questionnaire is part of the research study for my Plan B paper in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Educational Administration.

I would appreciate it if you would complete and return the questionnaire by March 23, 1990 in the enclosed, stamped envelope. It is important to return the questionnaire promptly to insure the success of this survey. I would welcome any comments you may have concerning any aspect of correspondence education not covered in the questionnaire. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely

Neil D. Howe

Neil D. Howe
Principal
Division of Independent Study

APPENDIX C

Neil D. Howe
Box 5036
State University Station
Fargo, ND 58105-5036

March 23, 1990

Dear Division Student:

On March 5, 1990 I mailed to you a "Student Evaluation of Correspondence Instruction" survey. I know this is a busy time of the school year for you, but would you please take a few minutes to complete and return the survey? Your views on high school correspondence instruction are important to the teachers, staff, and administration of the Division of Independent Study.

It is important to return the survey so that the results can contribute to a more successful program. Please return the survey by April 4, 1990. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Neil D. Howe, Principal
North Dakota Division of Independent Study

APPENDIX D

Appendix D

Students' School N = 142

School	State	N
Berthold High School	ND	1
Beulah High School	ND	1
Central Cass High School	ND	2
Columbus High School	ND	1
Des Lacs-Burlington High School	ND	1
Devils Lake High School	ND	1
Dickinson High School	ND	1
Division of Independent Study	ND	2
Edinburg High School	ND	1
Ellendale High School	ND	1
Enderlin High School	ND	1
Esmond High School	ND	1
Fargo South High School	ND	2
Finley-Sharon High School	ND	1
Grace City High School	ND	2
Hatton High School	ND	1
Hazen High School	ND	2
Hope High School	ND	1
Jamestown College	ND	1
Kensal High School	ND	1
Lansford High School	ND	2
Lisbon High School	ND	3
Maddock High School	ND	3
Mandan High School	ND	1
Max High School	ND	1
Mayville State University	ND	1
McClusky High School	ND	1
Minto High School	ND	1
Newburg High School	ND	1
New Town High School	ND	3
North Dakota State University	ND	1
North Sargent High School	ND	2
North Shore High School	ND	1
Oakes High School	ND	2
Powers Lake High School	ND	1
Red River High School	ND	1
Regent High School	ND	1
Richland High School	ND	1
Robinson High School	ND	1
Rock Lake High School	ND	1
Rolla High School	ND	2

St. Mary's High School - Bismarck	ND	1
Salem-Mennonite School	ND	2
Sheldon High School	ND	1
Starkweather High School	ND	3
Valley City High School	ND	1
Washburn High School	ND	1
West Fargo High School	ND	3
Williston High School	ND	1
Wimbledon-Courtney High School	ND	1
Wing High School	ND	1
Wolford High School	ND	1
Baker High School	MT	1
Butte Central High School	MT	1
Circle High School	MT	1
Conrad High School	MT	1
Culbertson High School	MT	1
Geyser High School	MT	2
Lustree Christian High School	MT	1
Shelby High School	MT	1
Emmons High School	MN	1
Granite Falls High School	MN	1
Howard Lake-Waverly High School	MN	1
Laporte High School	MN	1
St. Louis Park High School	MN	1
Stewart High School	MN	1
Toivola-Meadowlands High School	MN	2
Christian Heritage High School	WA	1
Liberty High School	WA	1
Lopez High School	WA	1
Garfield-Palouse High School	WA	1
Selkirk High School	WA	1
Upper Columbia Academy	WA	1
Ashwauben High School	WI	1
Northwestern High School	WI	1
Pepin Area High School	WI	1
West Bend East High School	WI	1
Edison High School	CO	1
Hanover High School	CO	2
Otis High School	CO	1
Petersburg High School	AK	1
Wallace High School	ID	2
Canton High School	SD	1
Copper Basin High School	TN	1

	128
No School Listed	34

APPENDIX E

Appendix E

Courses Currently Enrolled N = 167

Course	N
AGRICULTURE	
Farm Power & Machinery	1
ART	
Basic Drawing	2
Calligraphy	2
Knowing About Art	1
BUSINESS EDUCATION	
Accounting I	3
Keyboarding/Typing I	1
Keyboarding/Typing II	1
COMPUTER SCIENCE	
Computer & Programming I	2
Computer & Programming II	2
DRIVER EDUCATION	
Driver Education	5
ENGLISH	
Freshman Language & Composition	2
Developmental English	2
Freshman Literature	2
Sophomore Language & Composition	5
Junior Language & Composition	2
Senior Language & Composition	6
Business English	4
Journalism	1
American Literature	3
English Literature	1
World Literature	1
The Novel	3
Creative Writing	2

Courses Currently Enrolled N = 167

Course	N
FOREIGN LANGUAGES	
French I	2
German I	3
German II	1
German III	1
Latin II	
Russian I	1
Spanish I	11
Spanish II	2
HOME ECONOMICS	
Etiquette	1
Everyday Nursing	1
Personal Mgmt. for Ind. Living	1
MATHEMATICS	
General Mathematics I	5
General Mathematics II	3
Consumer Mathematics I	3
Consumer Mathematics II	1
Algebra I	2
Algebra II	2
Geometry I	2
Geometry II	1
Advanced Algebra/Trigonometry I	1
Trigonometry	1
Precalculus I	1
Precalculus II	1
MUSIC	
Beginning Piano	1
Music Appreciation	1
PHOTOGRAPHY	
Photography	1
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	
Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs	1
First Aid and Nutrition	1
Modern Health	4

Courses Currently Enrolled N = 167

Course	N
PRACTICAL AND MECHANICAL	
Basic Electricity	1
RELIGION	
New Testament	1
SCIENCE	
Physical Science I	3
Physical Science II	4
Biology II	2
Chemistry I	2
Physics I	1
Wildlife Management	2
SOCIAL STUDIES	
World History I	4
World History II	4
U.S. History I	5
U.S. History II	6
American Government	4
Comparative Government	2
Economics	2
North Dakota Government	2
Project Self-Discovery	3
Psychology	1
World Geography I	6